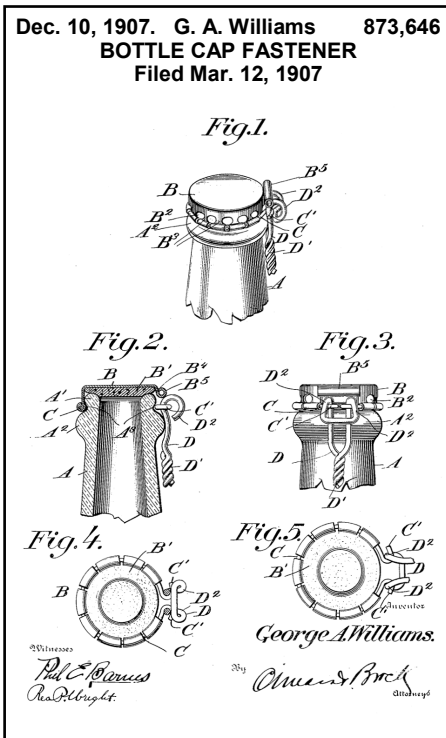
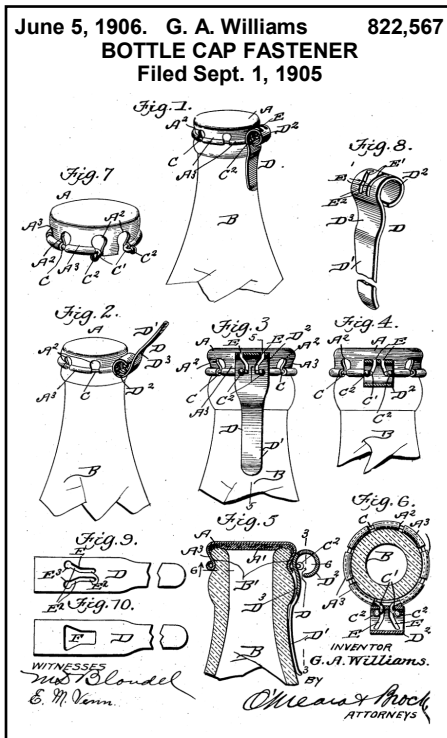


George Williams Kork-N-Seal

The Cap With the Little Lever By Don Thornton

George Albert Williams was awarded eight patents from 1906 to 1933 for his toggle switch “Kork-N-Seal” bottle capper, its improvements over the years and the machinery to attach the small device to bottles. As the story goes, Williams was boating with friends in 1901 when he cut his thumb with a screwdriver while trying to open a bottle of ginger ale.

Vowing to invent a better closure that could be opened without a tool and reseal the bottle, he tinkered with the idea for four years before applying for a patent for his “bottle cap fastener” on September 1, 1905. The patent was granted June 5, 1906, listing his hometown as Port Clinton, Ohio. He followed that patent with another one granted December 10, 1907, changing the solid lever, or tightening toggle, into a twisted wire toggle. His hometown was then Newcastle, Indiana.



Apply it
by HAND
Use it over and over!



Williams then moved to Waterbury, Connecticut where in 1909 he launched the Williams Sealing Corporation and began production of the “Williams Kork-N-Seal, The Cap With the Little Lever” in 1911. An early newspaper advertisement gave these directions: *To open: merely raise the lever and push with thumb. To reseal, replace cap on bottle and push lever down.*”

Just For Openers January-December 2026 2

George Williams Kork-N-Seal

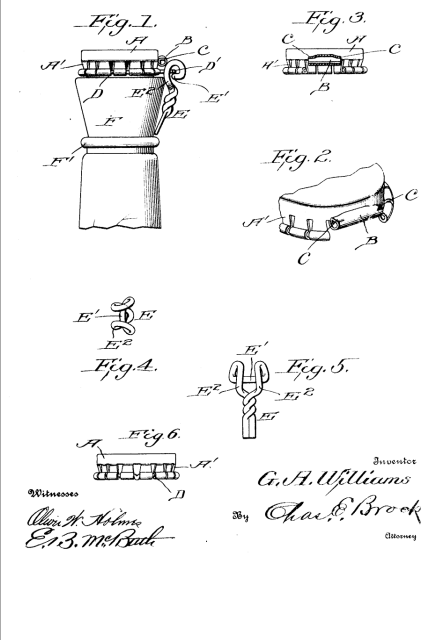
The Cap With the Little Lever By Don Thornton

An example of early model 1-inch in diameter cap, with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch lever, is marked on the top: **WILLIAMS KORK-N-SEAL THE KITCHEN RELIEF DECATUR, ILL. U.S.A.** Around the edge of the cap it is marked in small print: **FOR HOME USE ON CROWN FINISH ONLY.** Some of the early non-branded models were marked with sayings like "The Kitchen Relief," "Bye-Bye Corkscrews" and "Tools And Openers Unnecessary." Home bottlers were offered a box of 50 for \$1 while company name branding was a mainstay, led by beer companies.

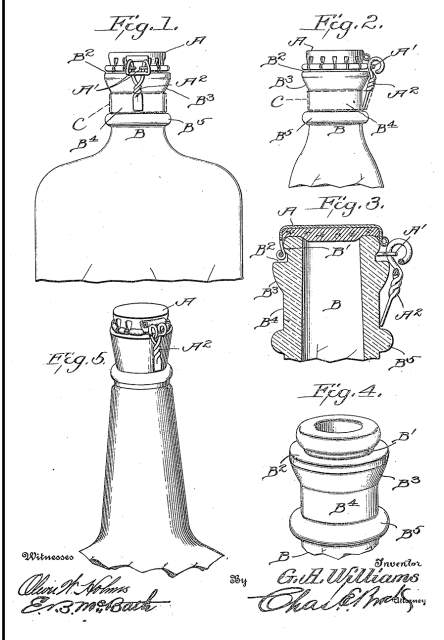
While in Waterbury Williams was awarded three more patents for improvements to his cap invention and a final one in 1930 after moving to Illinois.



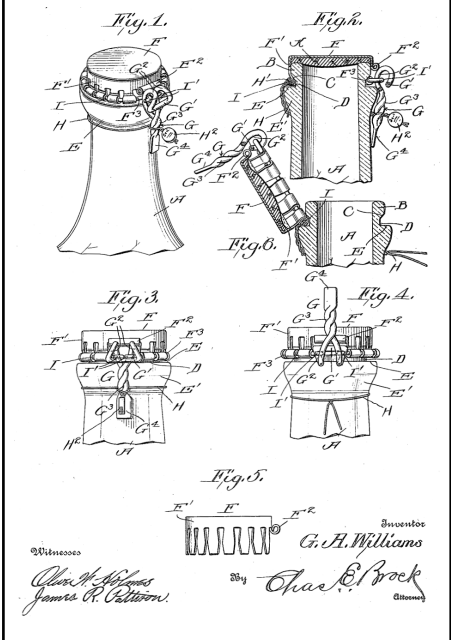
Sept. 1, 1914. G. A. Williams 1,108,959
BOTTLE CAP
Filed Sept. 30, 1912



Mar. 9, 1915. G. A. Williams 1,130,783
BOTTLE AND CAP FASTENER
Filed May 31, 1912



Feb. 6, 1917. G. A. Williams 1,214,734
BOTTLE AND CAP
Filed Mar. 21, 1910



Enticed by financial help offered by the Decatur, Illinois Association of Commerce (\$57,000 which was later repaid with interest), Williams pulled the plug on Waterbury and moved his very successful company there in 1917. He built a new, four-story plant, which a local newspaper reported "is an unusually attractive one for a factory building and is set in landscaped grounds which always are kept in prime condition ... as well cared for as any park." While in Decatur, Williams was awarded Patent No. 1,332,279 on March 2, 1920 for a "bottle capping machine" designed "for applying and fastening bottle caps such as shown and described in Williams Patent No. 873,646." On May 24, 1921, he trademarked the Kork-N-Seal name.

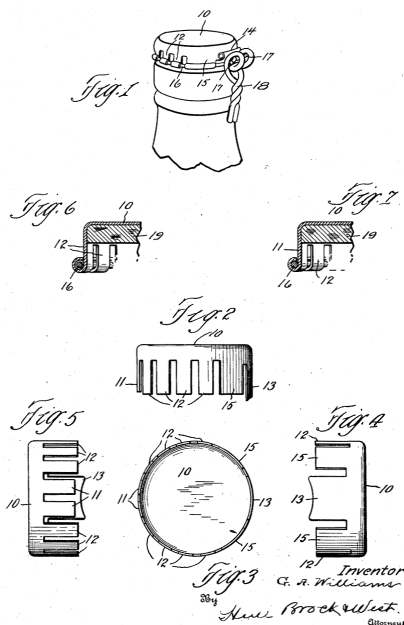
His Factory, George Williams' Monument



George Williams Kork-N-Seal

The Cap With the Little Lever By Don Thornton

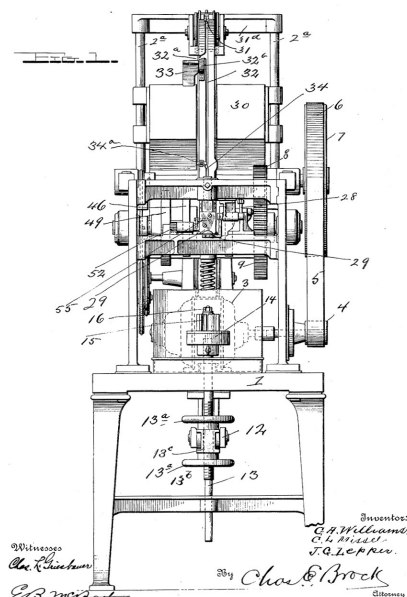
Jan. 14, 1930. G. A. Williams 1,743,945
BOTTLE CAP
Filed April 19, 1928



KORK-N-SEAL

For the next decade the company flourished, offering branding on the caps for sodas, beers and other products. It also expanded its "Kork-N-Seal" line to include just about any type of bottle. In a newspaper article in 1921, Williams boasted: "You may find this cap on bottles of liquid petroleum, vinegar or shampoo – on the can of insecticide – polish or lubricating oil or on the thousand other styles and types of bottles and cans at the drug store, grocery, garage or any places where bottled or canned liquids are sold. We make millions of them for every imaginable purpose and ship them to all parts of the world."

Mar. 2, 1920. G. A. Williams 1,332,279
C. L. Missel and J. G. Lepper
BOTTLE CAPPING MACHINE
Filed Oct. 16, 1913



Williams Sealing Corporation also went international, with associate manufacturing plants opening in London, Paris, Copenhagen and Sidney. Despite the Great Depression the company moved forward, although a bit slower. However, it suffered a major blow Nov. 11, 1931 with the drowning death of Williams at the age of 55 in a boating accident on Lake Decatur.

Just two years later there was a major reorganization of the company, with the top officials more than likely forced out. *The Herald and Review* of Decatur reported March 17, 1933 that O. L. Williams, who assumed the presidency of the company upon the death of his uncle,



For home bottling
HAND APPLIED

Home bottling's easy now. Just press on a home-use Kork-N-Seal and turn down the little lever. Your bottle's sealed airtight—and pressure-proof! To open, merely flip up the little lever—then save your Kork-N-Seal for the next bottle. For one Kork-N-Seal can be used repeatedly—many, many times. And each time

you have an airtight reseal! Try this economical method the next time you put up root beer, grape juice, catsup, etc. Kork-N-Seal's ideal, too, for resealing ginger ale and other carbonated drinks you buy. A generous supply costs so little you'll want a boxful. 50 Kork-N-Seals for only \$1. Get a box today.

and two other top officers, resigned and were replaced.

Then in 1936 the Crown Cork and Seal Company of Baltimore launched what appears to be an unfriendly takeover. *The Decatur Daily Review* reported November 24 of that year that Crown, considered at the time the largest manufacturer and distributor of patented bottle closures in the world, said it

George Williams Kork-N-Seal

The Cap With the Little Lever By Don Thornton

paid cash in its move to acquire Williams. The newspaper quoted Charles E. McManus, Crown president, as saying: "The controlling interest in stock in the Decatur firm was acquired from various persons." Crown continued to operate the Decatur factory, eventually changing the name to the Crown Cork Specialty Corporation, and the branding "Williams Kork-N-Seal" cap became just the "Kork-N-Seal."

The Crown capper design remained the same but now read: **KORK-N-SEAL PRESS DOWN FIRMLY.** In addition, a small cardboard box of six unbranded caps (price 10 cents) featured the name **KORK-N-SEAL** (without Williams) and on the bottom of the box: **COPYRIGHT 1945 CROWN CORK SPECIALTY CORP. DECATUR, ILL., DIVISION OF CROWN CORK AND SEAL CO. INC.** The box also gave detailed instructions: "Clean and sterilize bottles before using. Sealing surface of bottles must be free of nicks and cracks. Fill juice within 1" of the top. Wipe bottle with damp cloth, and apply cap by pushing on bottle with as much pressure as possible. Hold there, and with other hand, push down little lever. Allow to cool and store." Production ended sometime in the late 1940s



The Decatur Daily Review said in Williams' obituary November 12, 1931 that he fell into the frigid waters of Lake Decatur after slipping on the foredeck of his boat, the "Kork-In-Seal." The obit also reported: "It is a coincidence that he met his death in the same situation that gave birth to the idea for a better cap for bottles. It was on a yachting trip on the Hudson River that the incident occurred. This turned him to the invention that led to the Kork-N-Seal stopper." It was a "distressingly hot day on the river" and Williams got bottle of ginger ale and tried to open it. "He had no bottle opener and had to use a screw driver to get the cap off. He jabbed his thumb, making a painful wound... He determined then to make a better cap."



George A. Williams, 55 Dies In Lake Decatur after Accidental Fall from his Motor Boat causes Heart Attack

Decatur loses one of its most ardent backers. George A. Williams, inventor of Kork-N-Seal and founder of the company. Mr. Williams was drowned in Lake Decatur, Nov. 11, 1931.



FOOTNOTES: (1) The plug pun was intentional. (2) There is at least one novelty item to add to this report – a metal parrot figure with gaping beak (unsuitable to open crown caps) and red glass eyes mounted on a lever cap. (3) Beer companies that branded the caps include Acme, Alt Hreidelberg, Blatz, Blitz-Weinhart, Fox Deluxe, Gluek's, Lucky Lager, Monarch, Old Reading, Pfeiffer's, Peter Hand, Prager, Schmidt's, Stanton, Storz, Tavern Pale and Yuengling's.

Just For Openers January-December 2026 5

George Williams Kork-N-Seal

The Cap With the Little Lever By Don Thornton



To open, merely raise the lever and push with thumb.

The **SEAL** for CANS

To reseal: replace cap on can and push lever down.

Seals and Reseals Perfectly
Can't Jar Loose
Easy to Open Without a Tool

KORK-N-SEAL Nozzle pours smooth, steady stream. No afterdrip to collect dust and grit. No special spout or funnel necessary. Economical, Attractive, Convenient—and, So Safe.

Williams Sealing Corporation
Decatur, Illinois

Williams
KORK-N-SEAL
THE CAP WITH THE LITTLE LEVER

April 13, 1927

National Petroleum News 1927 Ad

113